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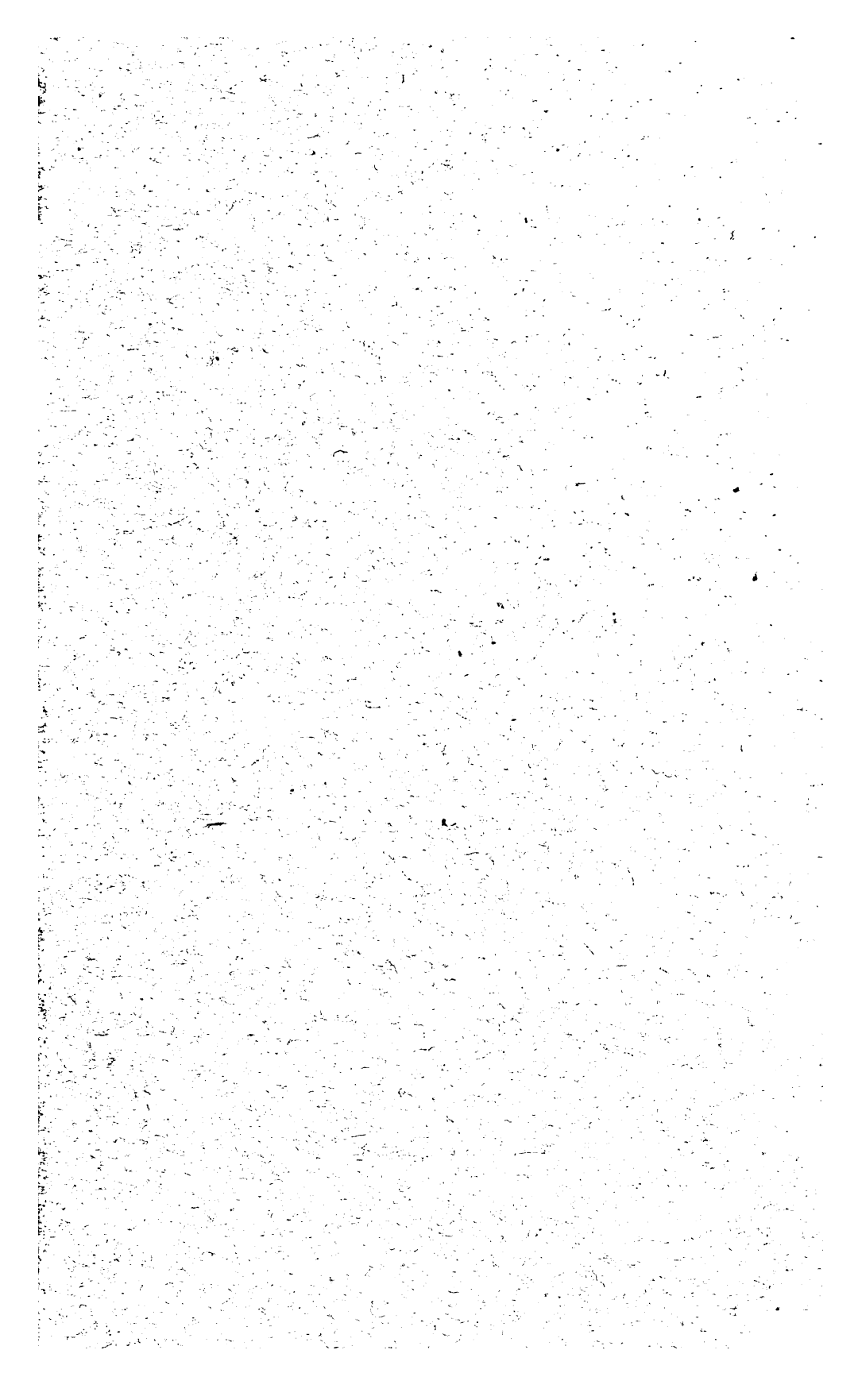
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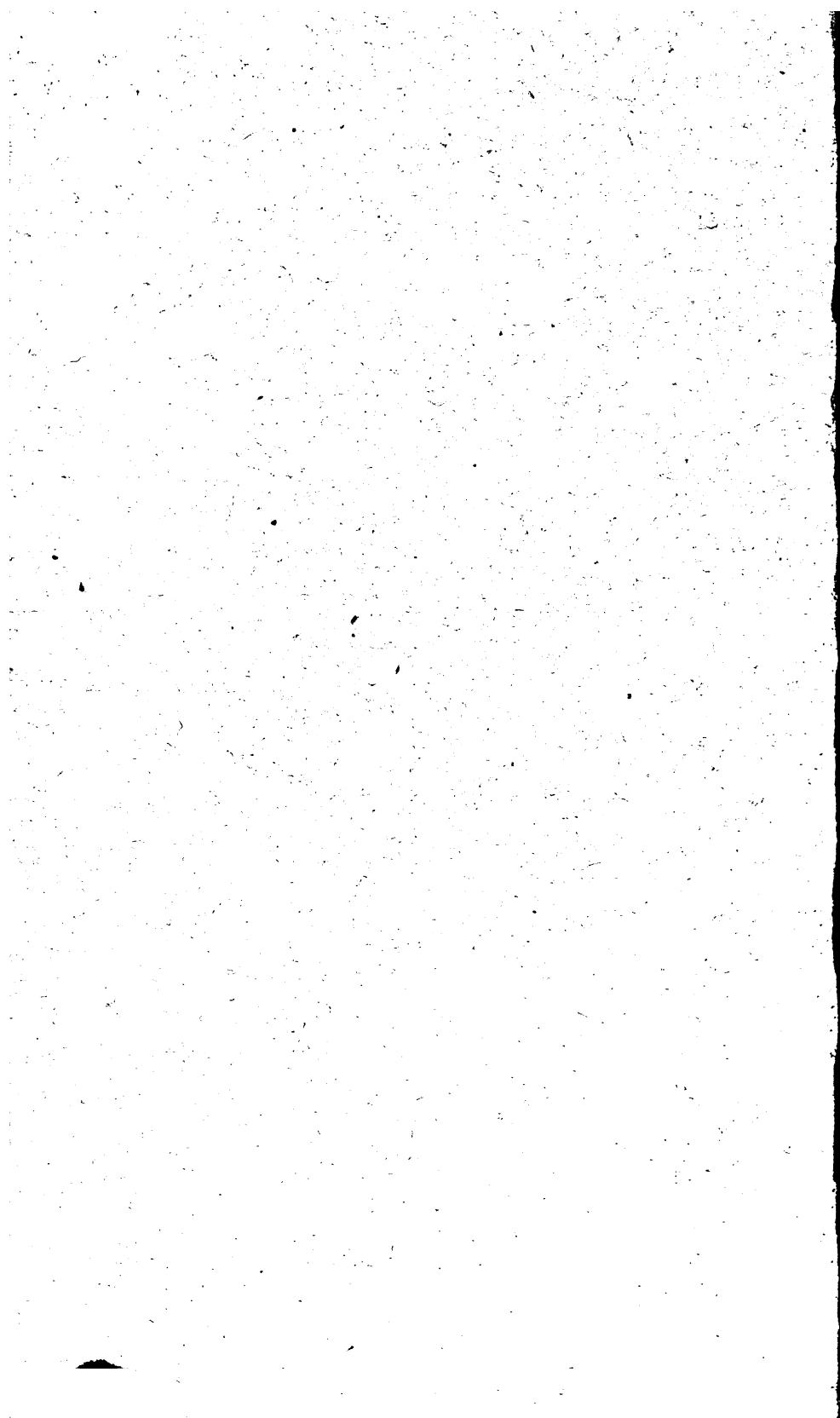
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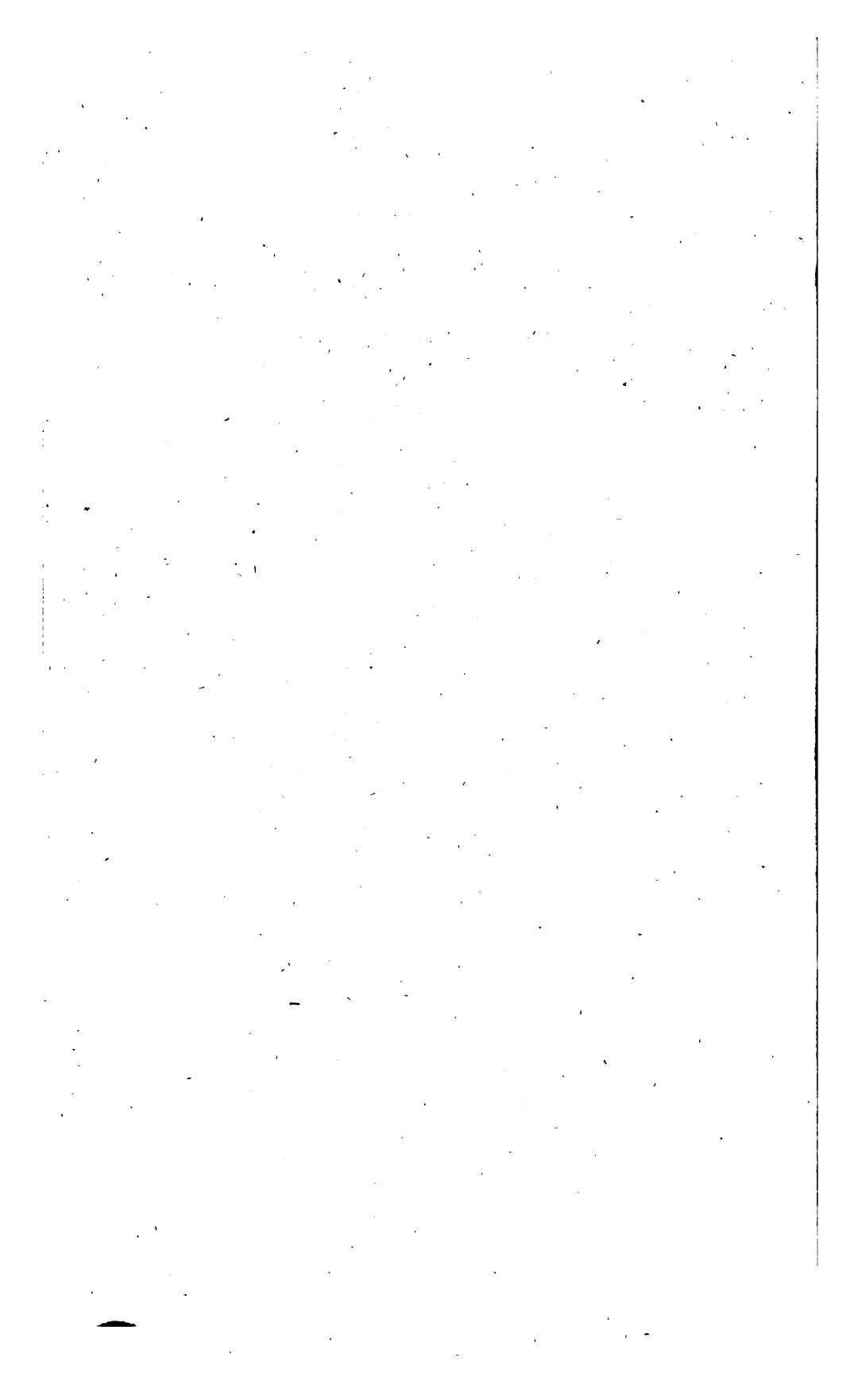
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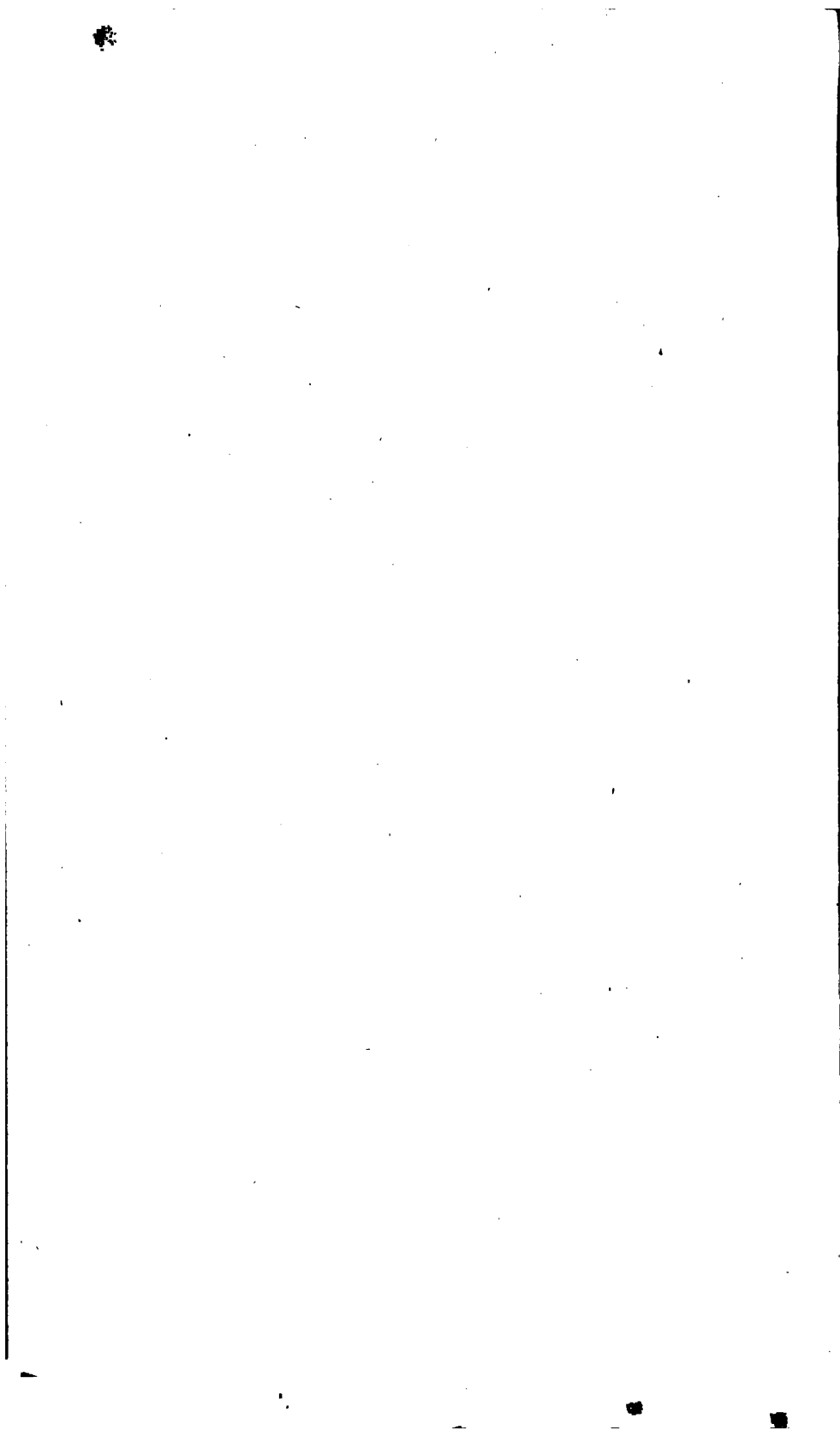
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DISCOURSE.

PHILIPPIANS I. 27, 28. Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ; that, whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries.

You will bear me witness, my friends, that I have never sought opportunities to thrust myself or my own affairs into the pulpit, or to trouble you with what troubled me. Even now, deeply as I am affected by the thought of the approaching dissolution of my pastoral connexions with this society, I am not certain that, if I were to consult my own inclinations solely, I should allude to the subject here. The custom, however, of delivering farewell discourses on occasions like the present has so much foundation in reason and nature, that to depart from it altogether would neither be wise nor respectful. But, to foreclose expectations which are not likely to be gratified, let me make two remarks in the outset. As I propose to limit my observations almost exclusively to a hasty glance at the past history and the future prospects of this society, they

can hardly be of any interest, except to those who belong to the society. And even in regard to them, as I do not feel as if I were going to such a distance as precludes the probability of my seeing and addressing them frequently hereafter, there would be no consistency in my addressing them now, as if it were for the last time. Of course there will be no occasion for those appeals to the sensibility, or those bursts of feeling, in which discourses of this kind are apt to abound.

Let us first look back on the way we have gone over together.

The history of this society, as you are aware, is almost spanned by my single ministry. It was incorporated by an act of the General Court, bearing date, February 9, 1816. Several events of the preceding year had prepared the way for it. In the first place, a public appeal had been made to the Orthodox Congregationalists of New England, calling on them to "come out and be separate" from those suspected of Unitarianism; and this was followed up by a suspension of the liberal system of ministerial exchanges which had prevailed until then, and by other measures tending to deprive Unitarians of the name and privileges of Christians. Whatever we may now think of the wisdom and justice of that step, it is certain that many, who were but little conversant with the theological questions in dispute, regarded the whole movement at the time, as harsh, ungracious, and precipitate, and the consequence was that either a majority, or

a large and respectable minority, of almost every Congregational society in this vicinity, declared for the liberal side, in the controversy which grew out of it. Again, the peace with England, which took place about the same time, had something to do with the gathering of this church. That event, it will be recollected, had the effect to produce a general amnesty in regard to political differences ; so that nothing was left of the estrangements originating in political causes to hinder those, who thought and felt alike on the subject of religion, from coming together and acting in concert. Precisely at this juncture, also, a church, the one now occupied by the Methodists, was offered for sale by the administrator of the estate of the late Mr. Harrison, into whose hands it had fallen. This was a coincidence, — may I not say, providence, — of which the liberal Congregationalists, (who were in the minority here, but who constituted a large and respectable minority,) were not slow to avail themselves ; and the church, accordingly, was bought, repaired, and opened for worship on the 9th of May, 1816.

I mention these circumstances, so creditable to the founders of this society, because it shows that they acted under the influence of public considerations alone, and not from private pique or local difficulties or misunderstandings of any kind. Not a step was taken by them which was not in entire consistency with respect and friendship for the First Church, from which most of them withdrew ; and thus they began that state of good feeling be-

tween this society, and all the other religious societies in the town, which, I am most happy in saying, has been cordially cherished and reciprocated from that time to the present.

Their first minister, Mr. Thomas Prentiss, was ordained March 26, 1817. To a sound mind and singular amenity of temper he united that devotedness to his profession, which makes it as certain as anything of this nature can be, that, if he had lived, he would soon have gathered around him a large and prosperous congregation. But it was otherwise appointed in the inscrutable counsels of heaven. He was here but little more than six months. After a distressing illness of eleven days, contracted, as it was supposed, in the over assiduous discharge of his pastoral duties, he departed this life on Sunday morning, the 5th of October.

My ordination took place, April 15, 1818. Of the ninety-five families, who then constituted the society, only thirty-three remain; meanwhile the whole number has gradually grown with the growth of the town, to about two hundred and twenty-five families.

The location of the old church being early objected to, as not sufficiently accessible to the bulk of the population, it was this circumstance, and not a want of room, or dissatisfaction with the house itself, which soon directed the attention of the proprietors to the expediency of building another. The site of the edifice in which we are now assembled was finally agreed upon, as the result of an

amicable compromise ; the necessary funds were subscribed, and the work commenced in the spring of 1818 ; and on the 10th of February of the following year, the whole was completed, and dedicated with the customary religious solemnities ; the cost, including that of the land and an organ, being nearly twenty-eight thousand dollars. In 1833, the interior of the church underwent thorough repairs, at an expense of about two thousand dollars more ; the aisles being then carpeted for the first time, a new pulpit built, and a better and more expensive organ obtained in exchange for the one formerly owned by the society.

For the present large and fine-toned bell we are chiefly indebted to a liberal bequest of the late Hon. Timothy Walker, who also gave the clock. The donors of the chandelier, and of the service of plate for the communion table, are still living to prevent a more explicit acknowledgment of these benefactions. I take a peculiar pleasure in noticing such acts of liberality on the part of wealthy individuals, because it affords me an opportunity to express a hope, that the practice of endowing churches, once carried to excess, and on superstitious grounds, will never be allowed to fall into the opposite extreme of indifference and neglect. Nothing, certainly, can be more natural and becoming, than a disposition, on the part of those whom God has prospered in their worldly affairs beyond what is common, to testify a sense of his bounty by thus recording their names among the friends and benefactors of their

accustomed places of worship. There are also two considerations, which make the suggestion peculiarly pertinent in this country, and at this time. The plan, now so common, and gradually becoming universal, of supporting religious institutions by a tax on pews, and not on property, makes the poor pay about as much as the rich towards the current expenses, notwithstanding the great difference in their ability, and notwithstanding they have so much less at stake, the safety of which is dependent on the indirect influences of these institutions in sustaining public order, and the public morals. To the plan itself I do not object, on the whole. Doubtless, in the existing state of things, it is a better plan than the old one. Still, so much the more ground is afforded for an earnest appeal to the generosity of the opulent members of the community, that they may do what they can, by bequest or otherwise, to rectify the obviously unequal action, in some respects, of the present system. Add to this the rapid extension amongst us of the voluntary principle, as it is called, occasioned by the repeal of those laws which made it legally obligatory on every individual to pay his proportion somewhere towards the support of religious worship. Here again, however, let me observe, that, in view of all the circumstances of the case, I do not regret the repeal of those laws. In the existing state of public opinion they were not, and they could not be, enforced; so that giving them a place in the statute-book any longer, could only serve to irritate

and estrange still more those who were irritated and estranged already, and keep them supplied with a popular topic of complaint and agitation. Nevertheless, the repeal of these laws, implying that the patronage and countenance of the state is virtually withdrawn, admonishes us that the support of religious institutions, on an independent and respectable footing, is left to depend so much the more on private munificence.

Immediately previous to the ordination of Mr. Prentiss, a church was regularly organized in this society, consisting of thirteen members, only five of whom still survive. One hundred and fifty have been added to this number since that time, making an average of about seven annually; with which are also to be reckoned, in order to come at the whole number of communicants, several, who commune with us statedly, though they have never, by a formal transference of their relations, connected themselves regularly with this church. In our regret, that accessions have not been more frequent and numerous, we find some consolation in knowing, that we have not fallen below the common average, and also, that the accessions during the last three years have almost doubled the average of preceding years, betokening a change for the better in this respect. There is, moreover, another fact, so creditable to this church, that I am unwilling to pass it over in silence. So far has it been from manifesting a disposition to interfere with the exercise of the just rights of the congregation, or be-

traying jealousy or uneasiness on this subject, that in two instances it has contributed largely from its own funds to carry into effect the plans of the society for the common good ; — three hundred dollars, in 1833, towards the purchase of the new organ, and seven hundred dollars, in 1835, towards the expense of building the chapel.

The average annual number of baptisms in this society has exceeded sixteen, amounting in all to 360. In regard to this important ordinance, a material change in the common practice has obtained, not only here, but I believe, in the liberal churches generally, within the last twenty years, which is worthy of notice. At the time of my settlement, public baptisms were the rule, and private baptisms the exception ; now private baptisms are the rule, and public baptisms the exception ; if, indeed, the latter, so far as children are concerned, may not be said, in many places, to be entirely given up. And is this, on the whole, to be regretted ? Those, doubtless, who are impatient of any change in religion, even though it may only be in the form of a form, or who make the essence of the rite to consist in the place, circumstances, or publicity, will cry out against the innovation as a manifest falling away from God. But not so those who look deeper, who expect changes of this sort in the progress of things, and who consider that the time had come when the publicity of the act not only operated as an obstacle to its performance, but distracted the mind in its performance, and so destroyed, to the parents at



least at the time, its beautiful and touching significance. Such persons, as it seems to me, can hardly fail to come to the conclusion, that the spirit, the meaning, the essence of the symbol is never more likely to be entered into from the heart, than when it is withdrawn from the public gaze, and made wholly a domestic service. Accordingly I am satisfied that, since the custom of private baptisms has prevailed, the rite has been resorted to not only with more frequency, but with more seriousness, and a better understanding of its purpose and obligation.

The record shows that two hundred and fifteen marriages have been solemnized by me, averaging a little more than ten annually. Only one was solemnized by my predecessor. The number of deaths I cannot give with exactness; but it does not vary much from two hundred and ninety, averaging about thirteen a year.

In reviewing the conduct of this society from the beginning, there are few things which have struck me more agreeably, than the willingness, manifested from time to time, to revise long-established practices, and to correct such as could be shown to be evil in themselves, or behind the age. The glory of Unitarianism will have departed, if the time should ever come, when its advocates and friends are unfaithful to the noble maxim laid down at the revival of the doctrine by the Polish reformers; **WE ARE NOT ASHAMED TO IMPROVE.** Let us forever cherish it as an honorable distinction, that

there is nothing in our principles which makes improvement an inconsistency ; that we do not take the ground of those sects which assume that they have attained to all truth already, or to infallible truth, so that any defection from the existing faith or worship, even by themselves, must be mortal sin. It is the just boast of liberal Christianity, which is doing more and more to recommend it in a critical age like the present, that it does not make safety to depend on having found out all truth, but on being guided by "the spirit of truth." Hence, it is to be regarded rather as a living and gradual development of Christianity, than as a petrification of one of its existing forms.

Unitarianism, as was intimated before, grew out of a reaction, occasioned by the alleged extravagance to which certain principles and practices were carried by the prevailing denominations. Of course, its first adherents were peculiarly exposed to the common error of reactions, — that of mistaking the opposite of wrong for right ; and hence their indiscriminate opposition to extra meetings, either for worship or religious instruction, and especially to evening lectures, or "night meetings," as they were disparagingly termed. Here, accordingly, for several years, the stated monthly lecture continued to be preached on Friday afternoon, though, as was to be expected, almost to empty pews and bare walls. Under these circumstances, therefore, it is at once amusing and instructive to look back and see with what extreme caution the church proceeded in alter-

ing the time, first to Friday evening, and afterwards to Sunday evening. I honor this caution. Next to the bigotry which rejects all reforms, would I disown that recklessness which, in urging them on, pays no regard to the feelings or the honest prejudices of differently constituted minds. I honor this caution ; still, in this instance, I welcome the change. Undoubtedly, the multiplication of religious meetings, and of evening meetings especially, may be carried to excess ; and is, moreover, peculiarly liable to certain flagrant abuses, such as exposure of health, the neglect of paramount domestic and social duties, and making the essence of religion to consist in "having itching ears." Experience, however, has taught us, that against excesses and abuses of this nature a very moderate share of good sense and prudence is a sufficient security, in a denomination, all whose besetting sins lie, I hardly need say, in another direction. Moreover, it is found that extra meetings, under proper regulations, afford opportunity for courses of lectures on subjects of general concernment, which would not be likely to be taken up in the regular services of the pulpit ; and also for a systematic exposition of Scripture, on a right understanding of the principles and application of which every reform in the church, in order to be solid and enduring, must be based. Nay, the very fact, that these meetings are *extra*, is attended with this advantage, among others ; by showing a willingness, on the part of the minister, to do considerably more than is required

of him, they prove him, at any rate, to be in earnest, and to be no mere hireling, and so give additional effect to his exertions, in the ordinary routine of professional duty, and to his professional character. The only objection to a stated Sunday evening service is found in the additional labor it would impose on the minister, a labor which but few, if any, have the physical ability to undergo, without a gradual undermining of their constitutions. Still, so obvious and manifold are its benefits, that, rather than relinquish it altogether, I make no doubt that the practice, now so common at the South, will, sooner or later, be adopted here; — that of appointing the regular hours of worship for the morning and evening, and giving up the afternoon to the Sunday School, and other exercises peculiarly suited to the younger part of the congregation.

And this leads me to mention another important subject, regarded in the outset by Unitarians generally with characteristic distrust and reserve; I mean the institution of Sunday Schools. Five years before the measure was carried into effect in this society, it was proposed and declined; partly on the ground, that Sunday Schools are not needed, where other schools are open to the children of all classes; partly because the tendency would be, it was thought, insensibly to lead parents to shift the responsibility in regard to the religious instruction of their families on others; and partly because it was feared, that in any event the effect would be, in most cases, to fill the minds of the young with crude and undigested

prejudices on the subject of religion, more likely to do them harm than good as they grew up. Such were the first impressions hastily taken up against the proposal by liberal Christians generally ; but their sober second thoughts set all things right. In the first place, on reconsidering their objections they saw that by reason of the mutual, and, on the whole, the salutary jealousy of the different sects in this country, nothing like systematic moral and religious instruction could any longer be even so much as attempted in the public schools ; so that either it must be given up altogether, as a public care, or provision must be made for it in the different religious communities. Again, the second objection, growing out of the alleged tendency of Sunday Schools to deaden the sense of parental responsibility on this subject, was found to involve a double fallacy. First, it assumed that the religious instruction of children was still attended to at home as formerly, which, in many families at least, was contrary to fact ; and secondly, that it would be less attended to at home because the children were called upon to show elsewhere how much they had learned, which was contrary to fact, and to reason too. To the other objection, that the only effect of the new plan would be to indoctrinate children with crude notions, it was soon felt to be a sufficient reply, that this was not any more likely to happen, as a general rule, to say the least, on the new plan than on the old one ; and further, that it was not the object of Sunday Schools to indoctri-

nate children with *notions* of any sort, but to excite and develop their moral and devotional sentiments. Individuals there might be in every society who could do better than send their children to such a school; still it did not follow, that the school was not needed. Accordingly, when in the spring of 1828 the subject was again brought before the congregation, the proposal was readily acceded to, and a large school was soon gathered, which has been growing in numbers and strength to this hour. At present, there are two hundred and sixty scholars, and forty teachers.

At first, the school was held in the body of the church; but this being soon found to be inconvenient, and being also objected to by the proprietors of the pews, it was moved the following year, to a building in Wood street, which had been fitted up and rented as a vestry for the society. Here it was straitened for room from the beginning, and this evil continuing to be felt more and more, finally led, in 1835, to the erection of the present chapel, at a cost of about forty-two hundred dollars. But a small part of this expense fell on the society, it being mostly defrayed by private subscriptions, a large appropriation of the church before mentioned, and the proceeds of a gift of land made sometime previously to the society, by the late Mr. Richard Boyleston, after whom the building is called. A fine organ was also purchased by generously disposed individuals, and set up in the chapel, and the other necessary apparatus has been from time to

time procured ; so that, as now organized and provided for, it is not perhaps going too far to say, that ours is among the largest, best appointed, and best accommodated Sunday Schools in the vicinity. For all this it is, in no small measure, indebted, as we have seen, to the liberality of the society ; and I feel as if I should be guilty of a culpable omission, were I to go away without expressing my conviction, that it is a liberality which, in every respect, has been wisely bestowed.

Of course it is easy and common, in this day of exaggeration, to exaggerate the benefits of the Sunday School ; and yet, there seems to me to be no extravagance in predicting that, with the modifications it is likely to receive from a larger and more varied experience, it is destined to become a very important instrument in the inculcation and diffusion of moral and religious truth. It is beginning to be extensively felt, that we have attained to that stage in the social progress, in which the sermon alone is found a very inadequate vehicle of the kind and degree of moral and religious information which the community requires ; and I can see no way in which the defect is so likely to be supplied, as by turning the younger part of every congregation into a sort of monitorial school, in which the minister shall act directly on the teachers, and they on the children, so that all may grow up under a regular course of moral and religious training. Besides, it will give the active spirits of a society something to do, and bind them to the society by that best and strongest

of ties, the tie of coöperation for the common good ; and by making them better acquainted with their principles, and with the grounds on which those principles rest, fortify them most effectually, as they grow up into life, against the sophistries of the skeptic and the agitator, and keep them from being carried about by every wind of doctrine. It should be enough, indeed, to win over rational and liberal Christians, at least, to this institution, to know that even in its present imperfect state of development and activity, a more anti-fanatical measure could hardly be devised, inasmuch as by its very nature and organization it makes religion to be a matter of instruction, and not of impulse or blind credulity. Certain I am, that, in this society in particular, its influences have been prevailingly good ; nay, I am bound to say, that I can hardly name any one cause, which, in my opinion, has done more, if so much, towards promoting the numerical strength of the society, as well as its harmony and moral and spiritual life and efficiency. And in the vacancy of the pastoral office, which is about to occur, I rejoice to believe that the temporary evils or inconveniences, occasioned thereby, are likely to be materially lessened by the fact, that an important part of the organization for religious instruction and education will go on as heretofore, and that many of the best influences, under which the younger portion of the congregation have profited so much, will not be suspended for a moment. A society with a good Sunday School can hardly be said, under any cir-

cumstances, to be without an effective Christian ministry.

Allow me, then, once more, on quitting this topic, earnestly to commend the school and its teachers to your favorable and serious regard. If so many persons of both sexes were to band themselves together from a purely benevolent motive, and bestow so much time and labor on well-considered measures for the promotion of the physical and worldly good of your children, would you not feel that it demanded the warmest acknowledgments? How much more, then, when their paramount object is to quicken, in the impressible and expanding souls of those whom you love better than you do yourselves, the germ of that divine life, which is to unfold itself in all the beauty of holiness in the present world, and in all the perfection of blessedness in that which is to come.

It only remains for me, before bidding you farewell, to call attention to a circumstance too intimately connected with the credit and prosperity of this society to be passed over without particular notice. I mean the harmony and good understanding, which, I believe I may say, to a degree considerably beyond what is common, have marked all its proceedings, from the beginning. To what has this been owing; and what can be done to perpetuate so desirable a state of things?

In looking back on what has been, we see that much of the peace and concord, which have prevailed among us, is to be ascribed to the spirit and

natural influence of our principles as Unitarians, or liberal Christians. And here I would not be understood to arrogate exemption on our part from any of the common frailties of humanity. I suppose that naturally we are as good as other men, and no better. And I allow, further, that it does not follow, because a man calls himself liberal, and professes liberal sentiments, that he must be liberal in reality. But this I say, other things being equal, he is more likely to be liberal in reality. The general strain of the preaching which he hears, a common regard to consistency, the very name which he bears, gives him a bias in that direction, makes it more likely that he will have that virtue than any other. Every sect, I suppose, may be said to represent some one of the leading ideas of Christianity, inasmuch as it does more than others to bring out that idea, and give it currency and effect in the world. Thus, the Catholic Church may be said to represent the idea of reverence; Calvinism, the idea of self-abasement; Methodism, the idea of divine love; Quakerism, the idea of the inward light; and in the same way Unitarianism, or liberal Christianity, may be said to represent the idea of harmony and peace. Its doctrine is, "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." Accordingly, it is not often that we find a Unitarian society distracted and rent by the religious differences which trouble other denominations. When, however, we do, it is, I allow, so much the more offensive,

because so much the more incongruous and unexpected. Some of the other denominations can find an apology for narrowness and exclusiveness, if not a temptation to it, in their creeds ; but we cannot. They may think they do well to be angry, in the common acceptation of that term ; they may think they do God service in turning the fight of faith into a real fight ; but we cannot. I repeat it therefore ; contentions and internal feuds are less excusable in a Unitarian Society, than in any other ; but then, in the nature of things, they are less likely to occur.

Again. Apart from the direct influences of our system, we are, as a body, averse, from taste and education, to interfere with our neighbors' concerns, especially in religion, or to trouble ourselves in any way, because they cannot see things with our eyes. As a body, our social position and our social character are such, that, not caring to hang on others, we do not care that others should hang on us. We also bear in mind that other people have consciences as well as we. There is no denomination, which, as a point of self-respect and social morality, values so highly, or cherishes so fondly, the sentiment of independence and individuality. Almost all our characteristic faults and defects originate in the extreme to which we sometimes push this principle. Look into our societies, and you will find families who have set side by side for years, and perhaps are members of the church, and yet hardly know each other by

name. This is not heartlessness, — at least it is not so in all cases, — but often comes of the excess to which we sometimes carry the principle of keeping ourselves to ourselves, and not meddling with other people. Hence, also, the awkwardness and inefficiency of Unitarians when they undertake the work of propagandists; especially when they think to do it by means of concerted action, or organization. There is no concealing the fact, that we make miserable partisans; and the reason is, we are unwilling to sink the individual in the mass, to make parts of a machine which is moved by other hands, to go here or there, and do this or that, as the wires are pulled from behind the scenes. This is what Unitarians, as a body, can never be made to do. They will not brook it. It is, perhaps, as much a matter of feeling as of conscience. At any rate, so it is; and, accordingly, those who like to lead, and the still greater number, who in religion like to be led, are very apt to leave us, or keep away from us. I do not mention this fact, you will perceive, as matter of unmixed felicitation: but it is matter of felicitation thus far; it keeps us in a great measure clear of the occasions and materials of discord and schism. It is hard to set one half of a society against the other, when each man is a party by himself. It is also hard to set any considerable part of the congregation against the minister, provided his character for intelligence and probity remains unquestioned, so long as he is heard, as is the case in most Unitarian societies,

not as though what he says ought of course to be believed, but only that it ought to be seriously considered. Under such circumstances, let the preacher advance an unwelcome doctrine, and the only effect, it will be likely to have on the independent thought of his hearers, will be to lead them to the conclusion, that on that particular point he is of one opinion, and they are of another.

I believe I have stated the case exactly as it is ; and if so, we see at once the advantages and disadvantages under which liberal Christians act. We have our defects and inconveniences, doubtless, — our easily besetting sins ; but all must admit, as it seems to me, that we are, to say the least, less combustible than other denominations. As a body we must not expect to grow very fast, or be exactly of one mind, or make much of each other, or occasion much stir or display ; but, as a compensation for this, if we are only true to our principles and legitimate biases, if we will consider what belongs to the idea of liberal Christianity, and be more anxious to realize that, than to mimic the ways of other sects, we may be pretty sure to live in peace, and the measure of growth attainable by us will be as sure as it is gradual and unobtrusive.

Need I say, then, that this society, sharing largely in the common character, and acting under the common influences above described, would probably have presented, at this time, the same unbroken front as now, under the ministry of any clergyman, tolerably intelligent and discreet ? If, per-

sonally, I have done anything to promote or secure such a result, it has been by paying more regard than is usual to two rules of ministerial conduct, on which, as it seems to me, it is difficult, in the existing state of things, to lay too much stress.

In the first place, I have been content to labor in my appropriate sphere as a Christian minister, making it a paramount object not to jeopardize my influence in that capacity by officiousness in other matters. I am not one of those who cannot bear to be told, that they have an "appropriate sphere." I have not supposed myself to be placed here to do all sorts of good, to all sorts of persons, in all sorts of ways, as it might happen, but to fulfil a particular vocation. This vocation was, as I conceived, to do all the good I could in my capacity as a Christian minister, first to my own people, and then to the community at large; and whatever other good was not inconsistent with this, or did not interfere with it. Accordingly, I have wholly forborne to mingle in politics, even to the extent of waiving my right of suffrage; I have seldom taken any part in local and exciting questions of a secular nature; neither have I been anxious to put myself forward among the leaders in all contested cases of reform. To this, I know, some will object, that a person does not cease to be a man and a citizen, merely because he is a minister. True; but then, I suppose, a person does not cease to be a man and a citizen, merely because, for good reasons, he waives the assertion, or at least the exercise of certain of his rights, as such.

“Aye, he may waive his rights, but not his duties ; and it is the duty of every citizen to vote.” And this also is true, provided only that it does not come into collision with a still higher duty ; in which event, the former ceases to be a duty. Now it seems to me that the duty, which a minister owes to his influence as a minister, is a higher one than that which he owes to his influence as a common man in society. Will it be said, as it sometimes has been, as if to show the untenableness of this position, that a minister is more of a citizen than he is of a minister, and more of a man than he is of a citizen ? True, again ; but what follows ? A man, to carry out the same sort of reasoning, is more of *a thing* than he is of a man ; but does it follow, that he ought to set a higher value on his relations as a thing, than on his relations as a man ? The argument, if it proves anything, proves too much. Add to this, that a minister, who has a mind for such things, if personally he keeps aloof from the party movements of the day, will find himself in a condition, on that very account, to act with more power on the prevailing ideas by which those movements are ultimately swayed and determined.

But will this reasoning apply to contested cases of social and moral reform ? Here, many will say, it is a minister's place to take the lead on one side or the other. And they say right as regards questions which fall naturally within his province ; but not so, when the main question, or the involved question is one, which his habits of life or condition

in society are not such as to qualify him to decide. In the latter case, however distasteful or humbling it may be to the active and ambitious spirits in the profession, it is obviously his duty to defer to the judgment of those who are in a better condition to understand the nature of the exigency, and the practical operation of the remedy proposed. Again, I know how easy it is to ascribe all moderation, even a wise and just moderation, to timidity, to selfish considerations, or to a temporizing spirit. But what then? Of course I do not deny that there are those who affect moderation from unworthy motives. Mine, perhaps, may have had its origin in mixed motives; for who can measure his own liability to self-delusion on subjects of this nature? But I suppose this liability to self-delusion is not all on one side. I suppose, that, in point of fact, there are not more temporizers among moderate men, than busybodies and mischief-makers among zealots; that there are not more seekers of ease than seekers of notoriety, under pretence of virtue and high moral aims. Nay, I suppose that, in days of feverish action and reaction, like the present, it often requires quite as much courage and firmness to do nothing, as to be an agitator. However, I judge no man. Others may have capacities of influence, so different from mine, and so much greater than mine, that it would be no less illogical than unfair, to argue from me to them, or from them to me.

The other principle referred to above, as governing my conduct here, is this. As a general rule I

have forborne to bring into the pulpit topics on which I was not pretty sure of being able to make myself understood. It is a common remark among those who love to use strong and unqualified expressions, that the truth never does any harm ; and in this I am disposed to concur generally, if by truth is meant *truth understood*. But truth may be misunderstood, and truth misunderstood is error, which certainly may do harm, and this form of error more perhaps than any other. At the same time I do not belong to the number of those who think that the topics of preaching must be taken from the surface of things. I do not believe in superficial preaching. I do not believe that there are any truths deeply interesting to humanity, which are so profound that they cannot, if treated in an earnest and plain manner, be made sufficiently intelligible to common minds, provided only that these minds are not in a morbid state of excitement in regard to the questions under discussion. To minds laboring under this morbid state of excitement, language on the much agitated and much agitating subject fails to do its office ; it does not convey precisely what it means, and neither more nor less. A multitude of associations will start up at every word, and become blended with its real import ; so that you will be understood to say what you do not say, and what you do not intend ; and thus, with the best intentions, you will sometimes only thicken the confusion which it was your object to clear up, and inflame still further the passions, which it was

your purpose to allay. On such subjects, at such times, either I have been silent altogether, or contented myself with insisting on the general principles which should govern us in coming to a decision, leaving it for each individual to apply these principles as his own knowledge of the practical difficulties in the case, often much greater than mine, should direct. If it should still be said, that the people demand a more full and frequent discussion of these disputed and inflammatory topics, let them demand it of the press, and let the press obey the call. But, considering the constitution of our religious societies, and the paramount object for which religious institutions are sustained, let the pulpit be reserved, as far as may be, for those weighty and solemn themes, which interest us all equally and alike, as immortal and accountable beings, which, when sounded in their depths, never weary by repetition, which bind the community together by creating everywhere the conscious tie of a common hope, and a common salvation, and make the gospel to be, as in its legitimate and ultimate influences it must be, "on earth, peace."

I have spoken of the means and agencies, by which a singular degree of harmony and unanimity has been maintained in this society from the first. I make no doubt that you will continue to enjoy this happy distinction, whether regard be had to what has been said of the principles and character of liberal Christians, or to the sort of man which you are likely, acting under the influence of these

principles and this character, to select as my successor. On this last hint, however, notwithstanding its delicacy, bear with me while I offer a suggestion or two, to which, of course, you will attach just as much importance as you see fit, and no more.

In the choice of a clergyman, it is not necessary, hardly indeed is it desirable, that he should be what is called, by way of distinction, a great man, or a brilliant man; but it is necessary that he should be a man of a fruitful and well-stored mind. The fanatical prejudice against mental culture, as being inconsistent with an entire surrender of the soul to the impulses of the spirit, is now, I believe, very generally given up. But an undue confidence is still sometimes reposed in what is termed *smartness*, a certain natural quickness of parts, a readiness and volubility of the tongue, though not backed by much learning, or good sense. A man of this description may preach half a dozen sermons with great effect, often with greater effect than the regularly educated divine; but without learning, good sense, and some talent for original observation, he will not be able to keep up, for any length of time, that sustained variety in his preaching, which is absolutely necessary, at the present day, to the success and usefulness of a minister, — the necessity being felt in exact proportion to the intelligence of the congregation. Equally necessary is it, that he should be a man of piety, and enter deeply into the spirit of his profession; for what the uneducated minister

cannot do, the indifferent and worldly-minded minister *will not* do. Selfish or worldly considerations may stimulate him to make the requisite efforts for a time ; but nothing except the love of God and the love of souls can inspire that earnestness and willingness to labor, which will never wear out or tire out. And be not afraid of one who is sincerely desirous of pleasing for its own sake, who manifests a strong natural inclination to accommodate and conciliate. Be not too much carried away by the cry for fearlessness and independence. Independence, genuine independence is a good thing, beyond question ; but it is possessed, I suspect, in the highest degree, by those who say the least about it, who complain the least of the restraints laid upon it in this community. I am not recommending a lover of popularity. A lover of popularity is not one who loves to please *for its own sake* ; he has ulterior objects. Still I recommend an unfeigned, ever-active, disinterested desire to please, a strong natural disposition to recommend one's self, and ingratiate one's self with persons of all ages, all classes, and all persuasions, so long as it can be done without the sacrifice of moral principle ; believing, as I do, that this trait of character is becoming every day more and more indispensable to usefulness in the Christian ministry.

But I will not multiply precautions which I know are not called for. Certainly, as was intimated before, it is not to be expected that a society, which has moved on for so many years in perfect har-

mony, and which appreciates the advantages resulting therefrom, will suddenly change its character, at the very moment when union and concert are most needed. It is not to be expected, that men of generous minds will choose a time, when the congregation is laboring under peculiar difficulty, or uncertainty, to fall away, or steal away; on the contrary, they will feel a new motive to lend it their utmost countenance and support, until it is again placed, in all its appointments, on a satisfactory and permanent footing. Again, it is not to be expected, that, in a society of liberal Christians, the majority will abuse its power by hurrying the settlement of a minister against the wishes of a considerable minority; neither is it to be expected that a small minority, except for reasons the most weighty, will persist in holding out against the well-considered and decided preferences of the great body of worshippers. For the sort of man you want, for the cast, so to speak, of mind and manners, that will best suit you, you are, of course, the best judges; but, when the question turns on the stability of his character, or the amount of his acquisitions, you will naturally avail yourselves of the information possessed by those, who have known him longer and more thoroughly. This is the course you will naturally take, and by taking it it is hardly possible that you should not unite at last on one, who, to use the common expression, will both *wear* and *grow*.

My friends, we have lived together so long, and

so happily, as to make it unnecessary, for appearance' sake, to get up a scene at parting. I am willing to say, however, that, until the trial came, I was not aware of the number and strength of the ties which bind me to you. But the pain of the separation is materially lessened, on my part, by the consideration, that, if it must take place, it could hardly take place at a better time, or under better circumstances. Besides, I owe it to myself to say, that it is not one of a multitude of fickle changes, marking my general character. The length of my ministry already much exceeds what is common at the present day. I have baptized the children of parents, whom I also baptized in infancy. A whole generation has grown up since I came here, though it seems but yesterday. You have had the best half of my life and strength; on all the most interesting topics which concern us as Christians and as men, you have had the best of my poor thoughts; so that if I could do anything, it has been done. Still I dare not shift the responsibility of my short-sighted judgment upon Providence, or affirm, in so many words, that, in asking a dismission, I have only acceded to the intimations of the divine will, for in this I may be mistaken. But thus much I can say; I have done no more than what, after long and serious deliberation, I believed God to approve and require. It is also a satisfaction to know, that, in accepting the proffered situation in the University, I have but yielded to a consideration, which has always been accounted a

sufficient reason for dissolving the pastoral connexions ever since the first settlement of the country, and even when those connexions were generally looked upon as being much more sacred and permanent than at present. But my greatest consolation is found in the affectionate, the considerate, the flattering manner in which the proposition has been entertained by you, and at last reluctantly acceded to, giving a beautiful finish and completeness to your whole conduct in relation to me, by crowning twenty-one years of uninterrupted kindness with what, under the circumstances, I must be permitted to regard as the greatest kindness of all.

But it is time to bring this discourse to a close. In doing so, permit me to mingle my farewell to the younger part of the congregation with a word of exhortation. I have taken some pains to enlighten you on the subject of religion, and interest you in it, not, I hope, altogether without success. I have felt, and, I still feel, that the future character of the denomination is to depend on the modification it is to receive from the rising generation. Most adult Unitarians were trained up under the influences of another faith; but with you it is different. The religion of your choice has had your first love; your religious affections have not been hurt by the disgusts, or the distrust, likely to be occasioned in those who feel that they have been imposed upon once under the name of religion, and are resolved never to be so again. Among you, therefore, we look to find the full average of relig-

ious sensibility, as well as of religious intelligence,—the fruit of our principles, operating unobstructed by extraneous influences, in all its ripeness and flavor. “Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.” Suffer not the illusions of the world, the sophistries of gainsayers, or the excitements of any transient popular agitation to inveigle you away. Be constantly in your places. My successor will look to you; you will grow up with him; he will lean upon you. Rally around him, and put new soul into his efforts, through the consciousness that he has the hearty sympathy and coöperation of the rising hopes of his flock.

To the Sunday School teachers, who have done so much to divide and cheer my labors, I would say, Persevere. The only question, still at issue respecting Sunday Schools, is the question of their actual effectiveness; and remember, that to make them truly effective, you must bring to the work an increasing faith in God and the human soul, and more and more of the self-devotion and self-denial of the Master, whose cross you have taken up.

My brethren of the church, with whom I have so long taken sweet counsel, will accept my earnest prayer, that grace, mercy, and peace may be multiplied upon them. The Lord’s body and blood, in which we have participated so often, are the symbols of a spiritual unity, which I rejoice to say has never, so far as my knowledge extends, been broken here by a breath of discord or uneasiness. His banner over us was love. Let it be so still. We

seek peace ; — not the peace of indifference, not the peace which is purchased by the compromise of a single Christian virtue, but the peace of humility and self-distrust, — peace, the evidence of that charity, which “ is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil ; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.”

And now, in bidding farewell to the congregation generally, and especially to those who have stood by me, and sustained me from the first, and also to those, if any such there are, who have connected themselves with this society from a regard to me personally, my heart is too full to utter itself as it would. I hope “ I have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you.” I hope I can “ take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men.” I have not kept myself apart from your sympathies. I have been with you in all seasons of joy and sorrow ; I have solemnized your nuptials ; I have baptized your children ; I have wept with you and prayed with you over the sick, the dying, and the dead. Hence the sacredness, the depth, the tenderness of the tie which binds together pastor and flock, intertwined, as it is, with the most joyous, affecting, and solemn experiences of human life. Let us not forget the happiness it gives, or the good growing out of it, because it cannot be broken without pain.

Brethren, the day is fast approaching, when we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, — I to answer for the manner in which I have preach-

ed, and you for the manner in which you have heard. May God of his infinite mercy grant, that on that day we may not meet to accuse and upbraid each other, but to be the helpers of each other's joy.

“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.” “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ; that, whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries.” “Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect; be of good comfort; be of one mind; live in peace: and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”

At a meeting of the society held in the Church immediately after the conclusion of the services of the afternoon, the accompanying letter was submitted by the Committee appointed to prepare it, and after being read, its acceptance was voted unanimously.

Voted, that the same Committee be directed to transmit the letter to the Rev. Dr. James Walker.

Voted, that the Parish Committee be directed to wait on Dr. Walker and request of him the publication of his course of lectures to young people.

Voted, that the same Committee also request of him a copy of the able and interesting sermons delivered this day, in order that the same may be printed for the use of the Society.

T. MARSHALL, *Moderator.*

THOMAS W. HOOPER, *Parish Clerk.*

Charlestown, July 14, 1839.

The Committee, to whom was referred the subject of preparing a suitable letter, to be presented by this society to their pastor, the Rev. James Walker, at the close of his pastoral relations, have attended to the duty assigned to them, and report the following letter for the consideration of this meeting.

CHARLES FORSTER,	} Committee. {	JAMES DANA,
T. MARSHALL,		WILLIAM J. WALKER,
SAMUEL ABBOT,		T. F. HOLDEN,
BENJAMIN THOMPSON,		JOSEPH PHIPPS.
BENJAMIN WHIPPLE,		

THE MEMBERS OF THE HARVARD CHURCH SOCIETY, TO THEIR PASTOR, THE REV. JAMES WALKER.

BELOVED FRIEND,

We are sensibly aware that the time is at hand, when the interesting and solemn relation, which has for more than twenty-one years subsisted between us in uninterrupted harmony, is to be dissolved, and that but a brief opportunity only is before us to address you again as our pastor, in any attempt we may desire to make to give utterance to those feelings and sentiments, which the idea of a separation excites within us.

Among the events which have transpired in the history of our connexion, those are most prominent which record your request for its dissolution, the subsequent proceedings in reference thereto, and our final acquiescence therein. To recur again, in detail, to the causes which induced your request, to the efforts, which, on our part, were made to effect its withdrawal, or to the deep-felt regret with which it was at length acceded to, we deem to be, at this time, uncalled for and unnecessary. They have become a part of our recorded history, and are still more deeply fixed in our hearts; and all that we would now ask as a privilege, or attempt as a duty, in the hour of separation, is gratefully and affectionately to present you our heartfelt thanks for all your past services, and our fervent prayers for your future welfare.

But this, though all that is now left us to do, we cannot find it in our hearts to do abruptly. The occasion which calls upon us for this parting address leads us irresistibly to a contemplation of the past, as well as our prospects for the future; and we would claim it as our privilege, before we separate, to linger awhile around the happy scenes and pleasant associations which we have enjoyed together, and which are by this event brought so freshly to our remembrance. We would recall too, for a moment, and not unwillingly, those hours of sadness and of sorrow through which we have passed in company, and recollect the voice of sympathy and encouragement by which they were mitigated, and made the messengers of good to us, through you, as the almoner of heaven's consolations.

With devout and grateful feelings we would bear in mind that an indulgent Providence has kindly continued you for many years a burning and a shining light on the watch-tower of our Zion, and that in the fulness of the blessings of the Gospel of Peace, you have not ceased to go in and out before us in all our domestic, social, and religious associations. Our youth, in all the buoyancy and bloom of their years, have been kindly and affectionately led in the paths of virtue and religion, and trained up in the way that they should go; the middle aged engrossed in the active pursuits of life, and exposed to all their dangers, have been instructed in the way of duty, and earnestly persuaded not to disregard the higher interests of spiritual culture and progress; and the aged, when oppressed by the weight of years, and the prospect of dissolution, have felt their burdens lightened and their troubled spirits tranquillized, by the voice of sympathy and hope, and their passage to the tomb made bright and cheerful, by the glories of immortality. In all our hours of joy we have felt our pleasures increased and sanctioned by your participation; and when sickness and

trouble have come upon us, your presence and instructions have lightened our sufferings, and taught us resignation.

We who are yet among the living cherish these recollections with heartfelt satisfaction, while those of our number who have been called to join the great congregation of the dead, departing in peace and in hope, have left behind them, indelibly impressed on the hearts of their kindred and friends, the memorials of the consoling efficacy of your ministrations.

During the long period that you have been placed over this people it has happened to us, as it happens to all; time has effected many changes, and death has called away many from amongst us, while a steadily increasing population, together with that intellectual progress incident to a progressive state of society, demanding a religion whose philosophy addresses itself to an enlightened understanding, and whose requirements are in perfect harmony with the best feelings and affections of our nature, have added many to, and greatly increased our numbers.

Through all these changes, however, and the circumstance is worthy of our remembrance and our gratitude, presenting to us, and to all a happier commentary on your labors amongst us than we can find language to express, the tide of harmony has flowed on in an unbroken current. Peace has reigned within our gates, and prosperity has smiled within our borders.

But it has pleased Providence in its divine allotments to indicate to you another sphere of action and of usefulness, which a sense of duty compels you not to disregard, and to call on us to consent to a separation which we continue to deplore with the utmost sorrow, but to which a corresponding sense of duty urges us to submit.

By this event the lesson, so frequently taught us by a mournful experience in this world of vicissitude and change, is again forcibly impressed on our minds, that no connexion, however useful, desirable, or endearing, is permanent, and that we should be prepared to yield submissively our best treasures, whenever called to be so by the Supreme Disposer of all beings and all events.

But we would not forget that in all our exposure to trial we are not left without strength and consolation; that it is the divine office of religion to come to us in aid of our frailties, teaching us resignation to the divine will, and that patiently to bear, and wisely to improve the various dispensations of Providence, furnishes the best evidence of religious progress, and the only source of needed consolation.

And among the events of divine appointment, we believe is to be

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